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Noordewier, S.; Korthagen, F.; Zwart, R.C.

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## **Promoting quality from within: Towards a new perspective on professional development and changes in school culture**

Saskia Noordewier  
CETAR, VU University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Institute for Multi-level Learning, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
s.noordewier@ond.vu.nl

Fred Korthagen  
CETAR, VU University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Institute for Multi-level Learning, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Rosanne Zwart  
CETAR, VU University, Amsterdam  
Teacher Learning Centre, Leiden University, The Netherlands

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# Promoting quality from within: Towards a new perspective on professional development and changes in school culture

## Abstract

*Many attempts to improve the quality of education focus on fixed goals set at forehand. For example, they aim at explicit competencies teachers should acquire. However, such attempts for improvement often fail. In this contribution, we describe an alternative perspective on professional and organisational development, which has shown to have significant results, both in the Netherlands and in the US (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2008). This perspective focuses on the question of how professionals can develop themselves in an optimal manner, without losing their personal power, and how they can hold on to their inner motivation to keep developing. From this perspective an approach for innovation has been developed called 'quality from within'. This approach is essentially bottom-up and starts from the qualities and commitment that teachers already have. In a study with a mixed-method design, we analysed the precise impact of the approach on teachers, students and school principals and on the school culture as a whole. Moreover, we analyzed which specific aspects of the approach stimulated or hindered these effects.*

## 1. Introduction

Since a couple of years, the Dutch Institute of Multi-level Learning (IML) is organizing innovation projects that are designed to start from the qualities and commitment that teachers or students already have and *their* ideals and concerns. The intervention that is used focuses on what we call the development of 'quality from within'. Although the intervention is limited to a small number of workshop days for staff, and the promotion of peer coaching, it seems to be highly successful according to the participants (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2008). One teacher formulates it this way: *"I have never felt more at home in my team than I do now. We are really talking to each other. That to me is the biggest outcome. And add to this the wonderful fact that it has already been channeled to the children. Life in the school is vibrant again"*. Another teacher says: *"I find it something very dear to me that I can stand there in front of the class and hand this 'flow' to these children, and that they hand it on to each other. And the trust you then give them and that they gain in each other. You then really have the feeling that you are giving them something for society, and that it is not just the maths lesson that matters"*. And a primary school principal, says: *"Teachers' progresses can be observed in the student group. Even an 'old hand' tells me with a broad grin that he doing things differently! That, too, I have been able to observe. They are really involved in it. I also notice that relations between teachers and students are improving. Mutual understanding is genuinely growing. There is more openness between colleagues"*.

The study reported on here, systematically explores in more detail the impact of the approach on the professional development of the participating teachers, and on the school culture as a whole (as reported by teachers). Moreover, it deals with the question which specific aspects of the approach stimulate or hinder these effects. We expect that insights from this study may be useful for other schools when designing new innovations.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. *What do the participants in the 'quality from within' projects perceive as the impact of the project and how does this – according to the participants - take form in daily practice?*

This first research question is studied at two levels: (1) at the level of the primary process in the classroom, i.e. we looked at outcomes both for the teachers themselves and for

their students, and (2) at the organisational level of the school, including the school culture.

2. *Do the participants become better facilitators of student and colleague learning through the 'quality from within' projects?*
3. *What aspects of the project, with regard to the content, context and the individual teachers, do the participants perceive as:*
  - a. *stimulating the learning process and the outcomes?*
  - b. *hindering or limiting the learning process and the outcomes?*

By the combination of research questions that depart both from what the participants perceive as relevant (question 1, and 3) and from the criteria the researchers had set on forehand (question 2), two approaches of research are being combined: the *evidence-based-approach* that tries to find evidence for the effectiveness of a certain approach and the *value-based-approach* that starts from the values and meaning relevant for the participants themselves.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Educational innovation is problematic

In the *International Handbook of Educational Change*, published in 1998, a review of a large number of studies on educational innovation showed that most innovations fail (Holmes, 1998, p. 254). An analysis of this phenomenon shows that teachers often do not feel taken seriously in their own professionalism and inspiration for the profession. Another very important reason is that often fixed goals are set on forehand without consulting the teachers (Korthagen, 2007). Although innovators might know what needs to be changed in the classroom, it is not sure that teachers have the same ideas about this and act just like the innovators would like to (Day, 1999). A top-down approach of innovation creates a feeling of external pressure for the teachers, usually leading to three types of basic responses: fight, flight, and freeze (Figure 1). They actively resist (fight), try to escape from the pressure to change (flight) or become very tense (freeze). These response patterns are noticeable in various schools, and in teachers under pressure. For example, a common flight or fight response of teachers is to put innovations away as being useless or impractical, and to speak negatively of educational innovators (Elliot, 1991).

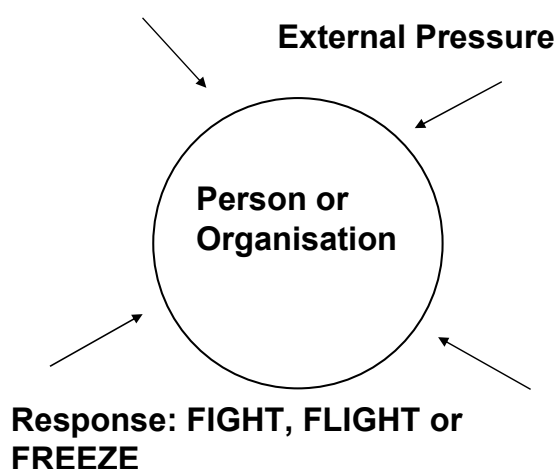


Figure 1: Response patterns to external pressure

This top-down thinking is very much part of the educational culture (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2008). Often educational innovators try to minimize the external pressure as much as possible. One way to do this is by promoting 'ownership' and make the teachers 'owner' of the innovation. But, that still means that they *must do* something, which implies a top-down approach. Also, according to Hargreaves et al. (1994), educational innovators have a lack of respect for teachers. In sum, the overall picture is rather hopeless: educational experts and teachers do not really interact, they do not really take each other seriously, and the top-down approach to educational innovation is often not very successful.

## 2.2 *The gap between theory and practice*

Another explanation for the failure of many educational innovations is the gap between theory and practice in teacher education. This gap was first noted by Dewey in 1904, and later many research studies have shown that teachers hardly apply the theories they learn in teacher education to their own teaching practice (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). One reason for this is that the traditional theory-to-practice model does not function well (Korthagen, 2007). This model, which Schön (1987) called the "technical-rationality model", is based on the idea that if research indicates what is needed for good teaching, teachers will just have to learn this, so they can apply the research outcomes in their teaching. Though this sounds logical, it appears not to work in practice. Many studies show that teachers hardly apply the theories they learn in teacher education (see e.g. Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). One of the explanations for this is the socialization process of beginning teachers within the school system (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005). Other explanations consider the teachers' prior knowledge and preconceptions, that show a remarkable resistance to change (Joram & Gabriele, 1998) and the holistic nature of teacher development, in which not only knowledge plays a role, but also feelings and emotions (Hargreaves, 1998). This affective dimension is too much neglected in the technical-rationality model.

## 2.3 *Positive psychology*

Another reason for the failure of innovations is the emphasis often put on what is still not good or imperfect, and has to be improved. This generates little enthusiasm in teachers and is rather ineffective. This insight builds on a fairly recent approach within clinical psychology, called *positive psychology*. The founders of this approach, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), state that for long psychology has focused on traumas, and on what is wrong with people (and what consequently has to be 'repaired' or improved). This traditional line of thinking is ineffective and psychology does not really succeed in contributing to the well-being of people, according to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi. They state that we should depart more from the strengths of people, from what they call *character strengths*, such as enthusiasm, care, courage, determination and creativity. We call such strengths *core qualities*, a term coined by Ofman (2000). According to Ofman, such qualities are always potentially present in a person and are already part of you. Whereas competencies, such as 'giving a clear and unambiguous explanation' can to a high degree be learnt, also at a later age. As a teacher, however hard you work at your competencies, it is your personal qualities that color the way you behave in your profession. Hamachek (1999, p. 209) puts it this way: "Consciously, we teach what we know; unconsciously, we teach who we are." Almaas (1986, p.148) refers to core qualities as 'essential aspects', and states that they are absolute in the sense that they cannot be further reduced to something else, or divided into more basic constituents. Another important aspect of core qualities is that they can be broadly applied, in virtually all areas. In other words: they have high 'transfer value' (Korthagen, 2004). Tickle (1999) states that in education the core qualities of people are too much neglected, as a result of a technical and analytical way of looking at people.

In the literature, insights from positive psychology are being connected to the *Self-Determination Theory* (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2002; Evelein, 2005), in which three basic psychological needs are distinguished: the need for *autonomy*, for *competence* and for *relatedness*. The idea is that if people are stimulated to identify and act upon their personal strengths, the fulfilment of these basic needs is promoted.

#### 2.4 Quality from within

Based on the above analysis of the causes of failure of educational innovations, our discussion on the gap between theory and practice, and the principles of positive psychology, a new approach for teacher education has been developed by Korthagen and Vasalos (2008), called 'Quality from within'. This approach starts from the qualities, commitment and inspiration that teachers already possess, and continues building from there. Fredrickson (2002) calls this the *broaden-and-build model*, which means the broadening and extension of the basis that is already there.

If change is being based on quality from within and people are acknowledged in their qualities and supported to make better use of them, a phenomenon called *flow* will appear (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This differs completely from the fight, flight and freeze patterns that occur in traditional attempts of innovations. When people are in flow they will happily take up new challenges, feel comfortable and powerful, learn fast and will optimally connect the demands of the new situation with their own inner capacities (Figure 2).

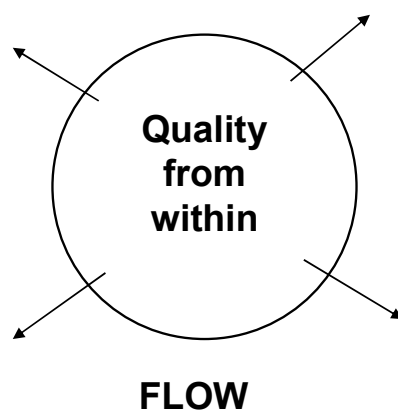
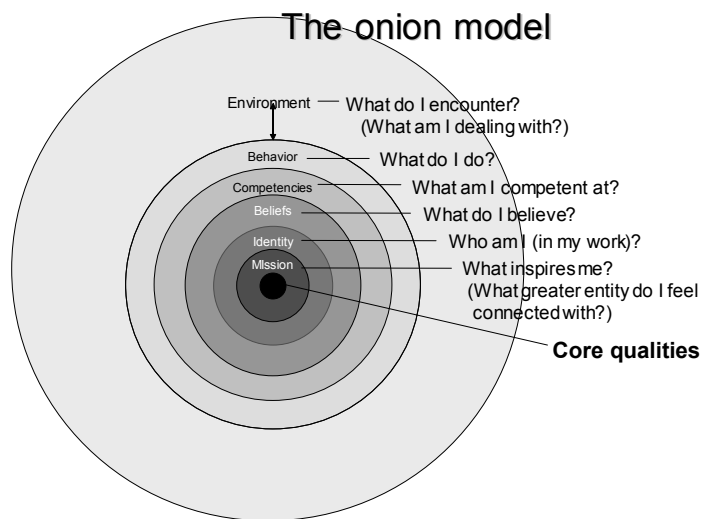


Figure 2: Tapping inner quality leads to flow

#### 2.5 Multi-level learning

In the quality from within approach the principles of Multi-level learning (MLL) are being used for teacher education (as described by Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, and Meijer, Korthagen, & Vasalos, 2009). The theory on MLL acknowledges already existing knowledge, qualities and inspirations of teachers. The starting point of this approach is the assumption that professional behaviour becomes more effective and fulfilling if connected with the deeper layers in a person. In the onion model (Korthagen, 2004, see Figure 3) six of such layers are distinguished: (1) environment, (2) behaviour, (3) competencies, (4) beliefs, (5) identity, and (6) personal mission (sometimes referred to as the layer of spirituality). Figure 3 shows the questions that are related to each of the six layers.



*Figure 3: The onion model*

In MLL, alignment between the different layers of the onion is being promoted, in other words a harmonious connection between the outer and the inner layers of the onion model. This means that the behaviour is both an effective response to the demands of the situation (environment) and is at the same time personally fulfilling. In order to reach this goal, the principles and methods of a specific kind of reflection, named core reflection are being used. Core reflection is a form of reflection based on the following key principles (Meijer, et.al., 2009):

1. Promoting awareness of ideals and core qualities in the person that are related to the situation reflected on, as a means of strengthening awareness of the layers of identity and mission.
2. Identifying internal obstacles to acting out these ideals and core qualities (i.e. promoting awareness of disharmony between onion layers).
3. Promoting awareness of the cognitive, emotional and motivational aspects embedded in 1 and 2.
4. Promoting a state of awareness in which the person is fully aware (cognitively and emotionally) of the discrepancy or friction between 1 and 2, and the self-created nature of the internal obstacles.
5. Trust in the process that takes place from within the person.
6. Support of acting out one's inner potential within the situation under reflection.
7. Promoting autonomy in using core reflection.

Finally, the theory on MLL suggests that increased alignment between the levels of the onion model correlates positively to more fulfilment of the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

### **3. Context of the study**

The 'quality from within' approach has been successfully implemented in a variety of Dutch schools, departments of teacher education, and other educational organizations.

In this study we examine the implementation of the approach in six primary schools between September 2008 and June 2009. Characteristics of the intervention at each school were:

1. A combination of three group meetings of one day each and much learning 'on the job'. The pedagogical approach of the meetings is based on the concept of realistic teacher education (Korthagen et al., 2001): we start from the present needs and concerns of the participants and their everyday practical experiences; on the spot experiences are constantly being created leading to core reflection.
2. Between meetings, the participants continuously try to apply what they have learned to practice, in the work with their students and with each other. They practice inter-collegial coaching in pairs, keep logbooks for reflecting on their experiences that they e-mail to the facilitators (and the rest of the group), and read in-depth articles.
3. Problems or concerns that people encounter in their work are being taken as the starting point of the discussion and the learning process in the group meetings and these obstacles are approached according to the principles of MLL.
4. Learning takes place in the school at more than just the teacher level. The school principals join the teachers in the learning process, and they participate in the workshop. If possible, also students are taking part, through inviting them for a group meeting, or through coaching-on-the job in the classroom. In contact with the students, the teachers can practice what has been learnt, and they are coached on this, thus promoting transfer into daily practice.
5. A monitor group is being installed, which consists of two up to five teachers, who monitor and support the development within the school.
6. The school is stimulated to (re)formulate their educational identity and mission. All teachers are taking part in this formulation process. Together they are discovering the deeper onion-layers at the school level. Essential in this is the development of a common language, not only supporting the team's discussions on the relationship between theory, vision, and practice, but also deepening the reflection of the individual teacher on his or her own practice.
7. The school is stimulated to come out with the innovation that is taking place, for example by organizing an afternoon for parents, for other schools or educational institutions, the educational inspectorate, the local press, et cetera. This forces an even sharper definition of the educational identity of the school, the demonstration of effects, and critical reflection on what has been achieved and what still has to be achieved.
8. A regional community of practice is being formed between the schools in one area and the Teacher Training College for Primary Education. Representatives of each school monitor group and representatives of the Teacher Training College take part in this community. Aim of the community is the structured exchange and transfer of knowledge, based on experiences with the 'Quality from within' approach in the schools.

Finally: the approach does not succeed when the present vision of the school or institution focuses primarily on the technical aspects of learning, and too little on the inter-human aspects, and the need for safety, trust, and relatedness. We sometimes speak of the 'cold' and the 'warm' side of learning. For optimal learning and for school development, both aspects should receive integrated attention.

The workshop facilitators were experienced trainers, who have been trained in the use of the MLL approach for several years. (For more details on the implementation of the MLL approach in this project, see Korthagen & Vasalos, 2008.)



## 4. Method

### 4.1 Design

We conducted a study with a mixed-method design. In this study, six primary schools where the 'Quality from within' approach was being implemented, were followed over a period of 11 months.

### 4.2 Data collection

Five instruments were used. They will be described below.

#### 4.2.1. Questionnaire on perception of work

A questionnaire was filled out by all the participants indicating how they perceived (themselves within) their work, (1) right before the project started, (2) right after it ended, and (3) three months later. This questionnaire was based on a pilot-study carried out in 2007. It consists of five sub scales: (1) fulfilment of the basic psychological need for *competence*, (2) fulfilment of the basic psychological need for *relatedness*, (3) fulfilment of the basic psychological need for *autonomy*, (4) self-efficacy regarding the principles of coaching that are central to the 'Quality from within' approach, and (5) motivation for coaching. The first three scales are based on a study by Evelein (2005), who presented evidence of the validity and reliability of these scales. Representative examples of items are:

Need for autonomy

- I feel free at work to come up with my ideas and opinions
- I feel I can decide for myself how I do my work

Need for competence

- The people at work tell me I am good at what I do
- I feel I am able to cope with my work

Need for relatedness

- My colleagues are friendly towards me
- I feel I have a bond with my colleagues

Self-efficacy in coaching students and colleagues

- I feel competent in in-depth coaching
- I can help people to express their personal qualities

Motivation for coaching

- It is important to me that people can come to me with their emotions
- I want to be inspiring for my colleagues

Participants scored the items on a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from (1) *not true at all* to (7) *very true*. Cronbach's alphas of the scales during the first measurement are shown in Table 1.

Scale	Cronbach's alpha
Autonomy	.75
Competence	.67
Relatedness	.70
Self-efficacy in coaching	.88
Motivation for coaching	.80

Table 1: Cronbach's alphas of the five scales of the questionnaire on perception of work

The questionnaire was filled out by all participating teachers of the six schools. Altogether this were 93 teachers for the first two measurement moments<sup>1</sup>. Some of these teachers could not fill out both questionnaires because, for example, they were ill during a certain period of time, or left the school. The questionnaires of these teachers were excluded from the data, which led to a final sample size of 61 teachers.

#### *4.2.2. Reflective reports*

Twice during the workshop period the teachers wrote reflective reports: between the first two workshop days, and between the second and last workshop day. These focused on what inspired them in the approach and the workshop day, what they were planning to do with this, and how this worked out in daily practice. Moreover, in these reports they reflected on what had supported and hindered their learning. The teachers send their reports to the facilitators, and to their colleagues if they wished to.

#### *4.2.3. Semi-structured interviews*

We conducted semi-structured interviews to study the teachers' experiences in depth. The interviews were based on a detailed guideline in which the research questions were operationalized into a number of sub questions, framed in the type of language that teachers and school principals use. At four schools we interviewed a sub sample of six teachers per school on what they learned from the project, on what had stimulated their learning, and on what had hindered it. We did this (1) halfway the workshop period and (2) within three weeks after it had ended. The six teachers per school were chosen on the basis of the reflective reports they had written after the first workshop day. All teachers were divided into categories, based on these reports:

- A) teachers who were very enthusiastic about the workshop and seemed to learn a lot
- B) teachers who were slightly positive about the workshop and seemed to learn some things
- C) teachers who were not enthusiastic about the workshop and seemed to learn little
- D) teachers who did not write a reflective report (so we did not know whether they would belong to one of the first three groups).

For the interviews we randomly chose within each school:

- 2 teachers from category A,
- 2 teachers from category C,
- 2 teachers from category D.

In one school there were no teachers in category D, so here we chose them from A and C. The remaining group of teachers, i.e. those who were not interviewed, mostly belonged to the categories A and B.

We also interviewed the principals of each school within three weeks after the workshop period had ended. We asked for his/her opinion on (1) the development of the school during the project and (2) essential characteristics of the intervention that made this development possible.<sup>2</sup>

#### *4.2.4 Intervention report*

We asked the workshop facilitators of each school for (1) the characteristics of the specific intervention at this school, (2) their opinion of the development of the school, and (3) their opinion on what was essential in the intervention to make this development possible. These data were mainly used to help us interpret the results found with the other instruments.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper we will limit ourselves to these first two measurement moments.

<sup>2</sup> At this moment, the data from the interviews with the school principals are still under analysis.

#### 4.2.5 Video recordings of classroom behaviour

Finally, with video-recordings of lessons we observed whether the changes were visible in the participants' teacher behavior. We observed four teachers one week before the workshop period. Within a month after it ended, we again observed three of them (one had left the school), as well as four other teachers.

In this paper, we report on the data collected with the first four instruments (with only the interviews from halfway the workshop period). The data from the classroom observations and the interviews from after the workshop period are still under analysis at this moment.

### 4.3 Data analysis

#### 4.3.1. Analysis of the questionnaire

The quantitative data structure has three levels:

- observations (N=122),
- nested within teachers (N=61; repeated measures with one pre-test and one post-test),
- nested within schools (N=6).

First, we looked at the mean on the sub scales at the pre-test and the post-test for the whole group of teachers. Then several models with various random effects and covariance structures were tested to see if there was a statistically significant change over time, corrected for the fact that the measurements were within one person. The final model contained only a random intercept for teachers within schools. Only the autonomy scale contained a (non-significant) random intercept for school. All used an unstructured covariance structure.

#### 4.3.2 Analysis of the interviews

The analysis of the interviews followed a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). First, four interviews were transcribed literally (two from category A and two from category C). On the basis of these transcripts, categories were developed that could be used for scoring the discourse in all interviews. This was done in discussions between the three authors of this article. The part of the interviews that focused on the outcomes of the 'quality from within' approach (research questions 1 and 2) was based on the onion model. For this purpose, we condensed the levels of the onion model into three, by combining adjacent levels into one scoring category (Figure 4).

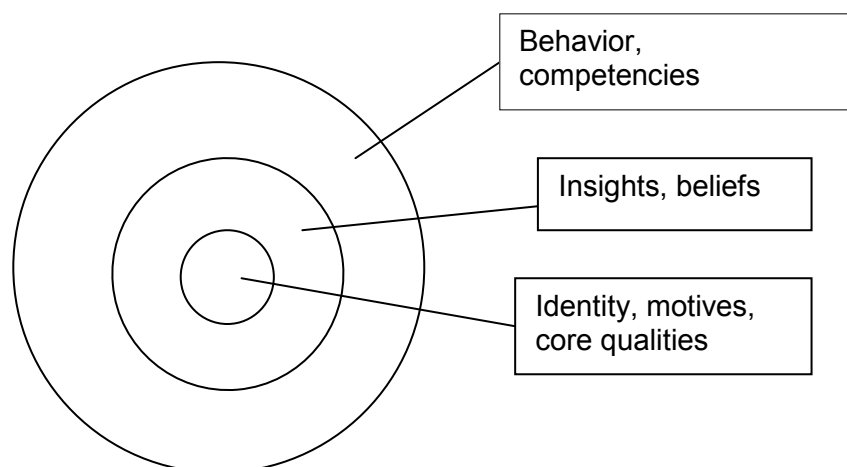


Figure 4: The simplified onion model

Using this scoring-model, the main researcher trained two research-assistants, which led to some small adjustments of the description of the categories.

With the aid of the final scoring model the main researcher and the two research assistants independently analyzed two interviews. Upon comparison, we agreed in most of the cases. The cases in which the assistants had other interpretations then the primary researcher were discussed and agreed on that the findings of the primary researcher where then imitable.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Quantitative data

At the level of the whole group of teachers, the scores on the scales Autonomy and Self-efficacy in coaching increased between the pre-test and post-test. On the other scales the increase was not significant (see Table 2 and Figure 5).

	Pre-test		Post-test		time		
Sub scale	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	b	se	p
Autonomy	5.11	.87	5.39	.71	.275	.08	.001***
Self-efficacy in coaching	4.74	.89	4.96	.78	.231	.08	.006**
Relatedness	5.51	.71	5.63	.58	.117	.07	.114
Motivation for coaching	5.61	.85	5.70	.84	.093	.07	.211
Competence	5.64	.74	5.75	.71	.116	.08	.159

Table 2: Means on the pre-test and post-test for the five scales of the questionnaire

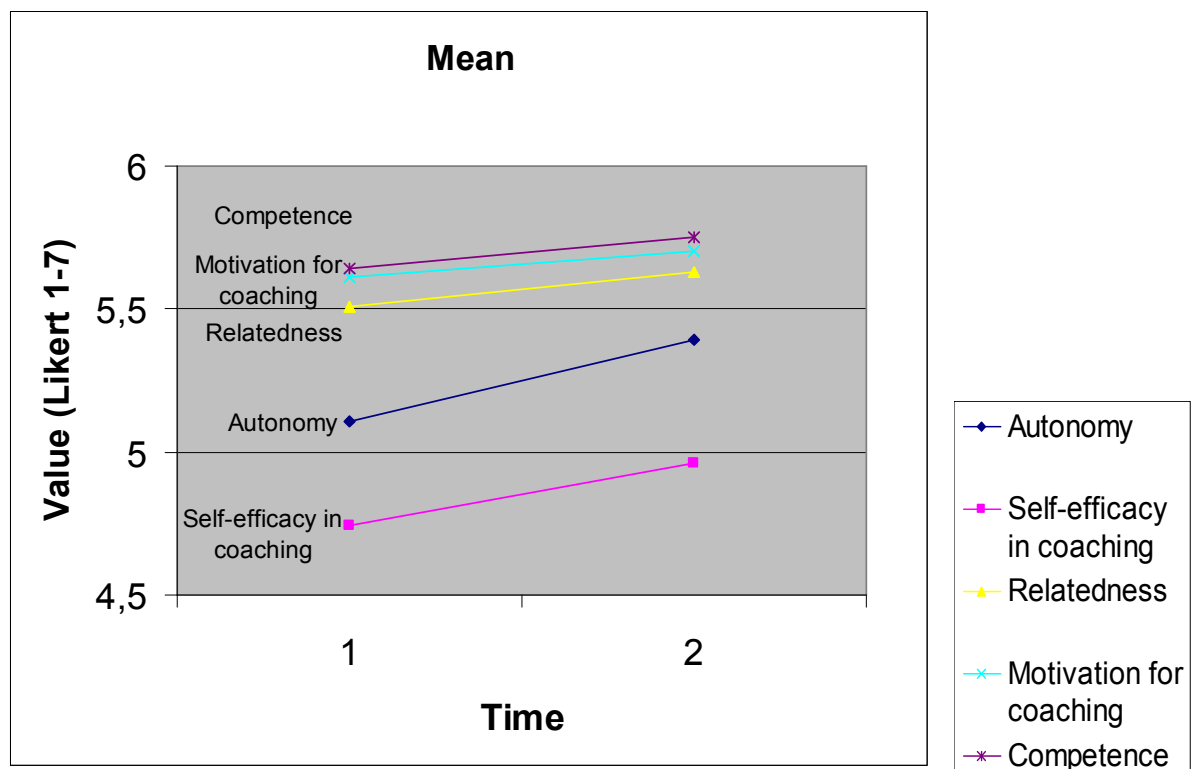


Figure 5: Means on the pre-test and post-test for the five scales of the questionnaire

## 5.2 Qualitative data: Outcomes and impact of the quality from within project, as reported in the interviews

### 5.2.1. Outcomes at the individual level (reported in the interviews)

In Table 3 we summarized the outcomes of the workshop that more than half of the teachers mentioned spontaneously at the individual level, after two workshop days.

Percentage	Outcomes	Explanation
96%	Increased coaching skills (regarding coaching of students and colleagues)	e.g. feedback on core qualities; stronger focus on the emotional and motivational side of learning; let the other person find the solution
78%	New and/or renewed insights and ideas about learning	e.g. "One learns from positive feedback"; "it is more useful to help someone find their own solution than presenting them with the solution."
70%	Increased awareness of their own motives	e.g. "I want to contribute to the well-being of the children"; "I want the children to learn how to solve their own problems, so that they become self-reliant and autonomous".
61%	Increased awareness of certain coaching skills	e.g. awareness of the difference between giving a compliment and giving feedback on core qualities.
65%	Increased awareness of their own core qualities	e.g. commitment, care, calmness, enthusiasm, honesty.
57%	Increased awareness of their own professional identity	e.g. a teacher who was only interested in teaching, became much more interested (and started playing a role) in the management of the school as a whole.

Table 3: Outcomes at the individual level, mentioned by more than half of the teachers.

A few quotes from participants may illustrate these findings::

- *"I now have tools for looking completely differently at myself and a situation... more positively. That can give a complete shift. Instead of thinking 'ah, I am so busy' and feeling irritated, I now decide consciously to get in touch with my quality of care, and I decide to look at the positive side of the situation... In this way I see much more, and I feel a much lighter kind of energy."*
- *"I ask the children more about how they feel, and what they think. I have noticed that the children are then able to come with their own solutions."*
- *"In conversations with my student teacher, I let her describe her experiences and ideas about the situation, instead of telling her myself what went right, and what went wrong, and how she should solve this."*

### 5.2.2. Outcomes regarding the students (reported in the teacher interviews)

Table 4 shows the most important outcomes of the workshop regarding the students, mentioned spontaneously by more than half of the the teachers after two workshop days.

Percentage	Outcomes	Explanation
70 %	Increased working and communicating skills	e.g. better attitude towards working and learning; better group work; more independent in solving problems; more understanding of each other's feelings; giving more positive feedback to each other; stronger feelings of self-reliance and autonomy.
61%	Students 'grow' through feedback on their core qualities	e.g. after this feedback students smile and have shining eyes; they become more self-confident.

Table 4: Outcomes of the workshop regarding the students, mentioned by more than half of the teachers.

Some quotes from participants:

- *"At days that I use it [core reflection], I notice that the children are working quite well and that their attitude is much better, and their concentration as well."*
- *"They [the students] are learning more with and from each other."*
- *"The children are more motivated when it comes out of themselves, if it was their own idea or discovery... Then things are bubbling, and there is enthusiasm. (...) Autonomy is very important for students, if they see: this is my learning process."*
- *"If you mention such a core quality, then you see the children grow, they look proud, and their eyes start to shine, so they find it really cool. (...) Then you see that they feel good for the rest of the morning or afternoon."*

### 5.2.3. Outcomes regarding the team and the school culture (reported in the interviews)

Table 5 shows the most important outcomes of the workshop at the level of the team and the school culture that more than half of the teachers mentioned spontaneously after two workshop days.

Percentage	Outcomes	Explanation
74 %	Teachers experience more openness an a deeper contact in school	e.g. Teachers are more open about their problems; they are more open about issues they are not satisfied with regarding the school or each other; they listen more to each other; they understand each other better.

Table 5: Outcomes of the workshop regarding the team and the school culture, mentioned by more than half of the teachers.

This can be illustrated by the following quotes from participants:

- *"The barrier to be open to each other really diminished. We are also taking more time for each other. I find that very positive. (...) Suppose you have a problem with something, then it will not be seen as your fault, you keep your own value."*

- *"We listen more to each other, and more often people say what they think of something."*

The outcomes that teachers observed at the level of the team or the school culture were rather varied. This means that more outcomes were mentioned, but that these were each mentioned by less than 20% of the teachers, for example:

- using core qualities in the assessments of the students, and in conversations about these qualities with the parents.
- a more shared vision of the coaching of students and colleagues.
- more trust and feelings of safety.

#### 5.2.4. Outcomes regarding the school principals, reported by the teachers

Table 6 shows the most important outcomes of the workshop that more than half of the teachers observed in the school principals' behavior..

Percentage	Outcomes	Explanation
52%	Better management and coaching skills	e.g. more sharing of their ideals and vision; better listening to what the team wants; being decisive.

*Table 6: Outcomes of the workshop observed in the school principals' behavior by more than half of the teachers*

This can be illustrated by the following quote from a participant:

- *"The principal asks and shares a lot about core reflection and about her ideals. That helps. (...) And when I had a problem and talked to her about it during a break, she immediately worked it out with me through core-reflection. (...) After five minutes I was ready and knew how to solve it. That was nice!"*

#### 5.2.5. Individual differences in the outcomes

When we analyzed the data at the several levels reported on above, we found striking differences between the enthusiastic teachers and those who were less enthusiastic. These differences seem to be related to their attitude towards learning in general. If they had an open, learning-oriented attitude, they were more enthusiastic about the project and seemed to learn more from it. Those who had a less open attitude, seemed to 'close up' already at the beginning, although the 'flow' in the schools that resulted from the workshop, almost always started to influence these less enthusiastic teachers after a while. Sometimes, however, this made them more positive on the one hand, but on the other hand still not very open towards the possibility that they could learn something themselves. An example was a teacher who had the conviction that, through her many years of experience in communication with people (also in a previous job), the content of the workshop had little to offer to her.

### 5.3 Qualitative data: Stimulating and hindering aspects

#### 5.3.1. Aspects that stimulated the outcomes

In Table 7 we summarize those aspects of the workshop, with regard to content, context, and the individual teachers, that more than half of the teachers saw as stimulating the learning process and the outcomes. These were mentioned spontaneously, after two workshop days.

Percentage	Helping aspects	Explanation
96%	Fitting in with the school (its development, culture, methods)	e.g. the school already had a feedback culture; the school wanted to get more students and get their identity clear and shared; the project is being connected to other projects and developments in the school, e.g. student assessments.
70%	Paying attention to the project during the school weeks	e.g. during staff meetings, active monitor group, peer coaching, sharing of successes, inspiring conversations with the school principal
70%	Inspiring experiences during and after the workshop	e.g. a really burning issue that was solved through a coaching exercise; two teachers that always have problems communicating with each other, started to understand each other.
61%	Open and active attitude towards the workshop & your own learning	e.g. formulating your own goal for the workshop and committing yourself to it; evaluating every day how you used core reflection and what the effects have been.

Table 7: Aspects that stimulated the process and outcomes.

This can be illustrated by the following quotes:

- *"I think about the workshop and what I want with it. And I plan conversations [with the students] in order to practice and become competent at it."*
- *"When we practiced [with the core reflection model], I solved my biggest problem"*
- *"The installation of a monitor group, that is active and feels responsible, helps (...) [a monitor group] that brings it in at staff meetings, and does exercises that you can also do in your classroom. That is the way to keep it alive!"*

### 5.3 2. Aspects that hindered the outcomes

In Table 8, we summarize those aspects of the workshop, with regard to content, context, and the individual teachers, that the teachers saw as hindering or limiting the learning process and the outcomes. As we had selected a relatively high percentage of less enthusiastic teachers for the interviews, it helped us to get a good insight in the reasons why a small number of teachers were not so positive, at least not after one or two workshop sessions. Table 8 shows the hindering aspects that were most often mentioned.



Percentage	Hindering aspects	Explanation
57%	Lack of time and busyness during work	e.g. other workshops or projects in the same period.
44%	Workshop was not practical enough	e.g. they had to listen too much; the workshop is different from classroom practice.
22%	Resistance	e.g. too much attention given to the teacher as a person, or too much attention given to emotions.

Table 8: Aspects that hindered the process and outcomes.

An illustration:

- *"I felt a lot of resistance at the start (...) I found it very fuzzy, and I am a direct person. (...) this question of 'what do you feel about that?', it just does not fit me. I felt very irritated."*

## 6. Conclusion & discussion

This paper presents the outcomes of the 'quality from within' approach at six primary schools in the Netherlands. It also describes what aspects of the approach, the school and the individual teachers were stimulating or hindering these outcomes. In this final section we will formulate our main conclusions. Before doing so, we want to mention an important limitation of this study.

### 6.1 Limitation

The findings reported on are almost all based on participants' reports. Although we believe that this contributes to the ecological validity of the study, a certain subjectivity will probably influence the outcomes as reported by the teachers. It is important to note that we did not interview the students. However, we did make a number of classroom observations, recorded on video, in order to check whether the changes could also be observed in terms of teacher or student behavior. However, the findings from these observations have not yet been included in this paper.

### 6.2 Main outcomes

Tables 4-6 show that in the interviews, a large number of the teachers report a number of important outcomes at various levels. Given the relatively brief intervention period, this seems noteworthy, especially in the light of the well known problems of educational innovation (see Theoretical Framework section). This is even more remarkable, as the sub sample from which these interview data are collected, contained a higher percentage of teachers who were relatively negative about the approach, in comparison with the whole sample. We found statistically significant increases in feelings of autonomy and in self-efficacy regarding coaching of students and colleagues.

Tables 7 and 8 show a number of interesting stimulating and hindering aspects with regard to content, context, and the participating teachers. Most remarkable is that 96% of the participants reported as stimulating that the approach fitted in with the school (its development, culture, methods). This concurs with the central goal of the 'quality from within' approach, namely to build on what is already there. The approach aims at the development of what is called 'quality from within'. Apparently the project has succeeded in reaching this aim. The projects at the six schools started from the qualities and commitment that teachers and students already have and *their* ideals and concerns, as the basis for learning new

insights, skills, and attitudes, and for developing more awareness of their own qualities. Our study seems to confirm that this 'quality from within' approach is a highly successful model of professional development.

### *6.3 Multi-level learning*

The goal of the projects at the six schools was to promote a learning process at all, or most of the levels of the onion model (see Figure 3). Our findings show that this is indeed what happened in the participants. As described in the method section, in the analysis we condensed the six levels into three by combining adjacent levels, and we found that 78% of the teachers who were interviewed, mentioned individual outcomes at each of these three levels. 9% mentioned outcomes at two levels and 13% at only one level. From these two latter groups, 80% were from the same school. It is interesting to note that this was a new school, which had started only half a year before the project began. This school's mission and method of working was already very similar to much of the 'quality from within' approach. Moreover, all teachers were selected on the basis their ability to reflect, their open way of communicating, and their positive attitude and behavior towards students. As a result, they did not learn many new things at the inner levels of the onion, but they did develop their behavior and competencies. In other words, the workshop helped them to concretize their already existing educational philosophy.

We conclude that the principle of multi-level learning, as visualized with the onion levels, has indeed been realized in the schools. We consider this an important explanation of the outcomes of the project.

### *6.4 Enhanced feelings of autonomy in teachers and students*

The teachers reported that both they themselves and their students experienced enhanced feelings of autonomy. This result is interesting, as on the basis of the extensive theoretical framework of the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), we may conclude that an increase in autonomy contributes to feelings of well-being, in both the teachers and their students. Feelings of autonomy have also been found to be highly related to the ability to cope with stress (see for an overview of studies: Schaufeli, Maslach & Marek, 1993). The opposite of autonomy, i.e. a lack of personal control, is a factor that contributes to burnout. When people feel that they have very little autonomy to decide what needs to be done in their job, they more easily show signs of burnout. In the Netherlands, for example, 14% of the people working in education have burnout complaints (CBS, 2004). This is the highest percentage from all organizational branches. Our results may thus show an important direction for supporting teachers in their stressful profession, and for diminishing the alarming percentages of burnout amongst teachers.

### *6.5 How to make innovations successful?*

In the Theoretical Framework section we noticed that most educational innovations fail (Holmes, 1998). The analysis of the data of this study yields some interesting ideas on how to make innovations more effective.

First, the basic assumption underlying the 'quality from within' approach concurs with Fredrickson's (2002) broaden and build model. On the basis of the research outcomes, we believe that in educational innovations, and in the professional development of teachers, much more attention should be given to the qualities that teachers, school principals (and students!) already have, and the existing developments and culture within the schools. As some impressive other examples of professional development and school development have also shown, learning processes at the individual and the organizational level start to 'flow' much more smoothly as soon as people feel that their strengths are taken seriously (cf. Day, 1999; Elliot, 1991).

Secondly, it is important to keep the intervention continuously alive in the school. One effective way of doing this is by creating an active 'monitor group', that monitors and supports the development within the school. In the 'quality from within' approach, a monitor group consists of two to five teachers, and ideally contains one of the informal leaders of the school, a teacher who is very enthusiastic about the approach, and one who is not so enthusiastic. This group can help to keep the things learned in the workshop alive during the practical work in the school, for example by paying attention to it in every staff meeting, in the daily conversations between staff, and by constantly putting it on the agenda. Specific instances reported by members of the monitor groups are: sharing successes, discussing a 'difficult' student from the 'quality from within' view, doing small exercises with the teachers that they can do with the students as well. Other ways in which the monitor group can stimulate the innovation is by talking about it during the lunch breaks, and by organizing a meeting to inform the parents about the project. Keeping the workshop alive is also supported by peer coaching in between the workshop days, a school principal who is showing that s/he uses it, and by connecting ideas from the workshop with other developments in school, e.g. student assessments.

Finally, an important factor in making the innovation succeed is an open and active learning attitude in the teachers. By comparing the stories of enthusiastic and less enthusiastic teachers, it became evident that the learning attitude of participants had a direct influence on how they perceived the project and on what they learned. Van Eekelen (2005) studied what she calls teachers' willingness to learn, and explains the relation between teachers' learning attitudes and their capacity for self-directed learning. This mirrors what we saw in our study: those teachers who had an open and active attitude, were able to direct their own professional growth during the project and were even able to support others in their learning. This raises the question of how to deal with teachers that are not so open towards learning, also because we feel they have a negative influence on their colleagues' learning. Van Eekelen (2005) suggests that the first stage of the development of the willingness to learn is to develop 'problem sensitivity'.

We recognize that the basic tenet of the 'quality from within' approach, namely to build on existing strengths and concerns of the teachers, requires that these teachers have a certain awareness, not only of their core qualities, but also of situations in their practices that could be improved. Perhaps for those teachers a more gradual approach is needed, in which they get more time to reflect on their daily practices, and to identify issues they might want to work on. We suspect that some of the teachers who did not show much willingness to learn, may in fact have a lack of self-confidence, and are perhaps afraid to look at themselves from a more critical stance. If this is true, it could suggest that even more safety is needed for those teachers than the approach already tries to promote through its focus on strengths. For example, the intervention could start with giving them the opportunity to show to their colleagues what they are good at, for example in small groups. An activity that is being experimented with is a small group assignment to share a successful experience from last weeks' teaching, where colleagues are asked to name the core qualities of the teacher who brings in the experience. Almost always, the teacher not only feels supported by this activity, but also starts to talk about a concern. Apparently, the safety that is created through the emphasis on strengths, supports problem sensitivity.

Again this seems to support the fundament of the 'quality from within approach', namely the idea not to start from the insights of educational experts, but from what is already there in the teachers and schools, and help the participants to make their views more explicit, and use it as the basis for further development. Regarding this issue, we want to be very precise. Although the approach does not start from an a priori view of the change that is needed in a specific school, it does build on expert knowledge about change, especially on notions from positive psychology and the theory on multi-level learning. These notions are brought in by the facilitators during the workshop. It is our experience that much training of the facilitators

of the 'quality from within' approach is needed, in order to make the approach effective. This may partly be caused by the fact that the approach is a fairly radical move away from traditional models of professional development. We believe that the approach shows an important alternative to the often disappointing attempts for educational innovation and staff development.

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